

LIBERALIZATION OF TRADE IN SERVICES UNDER RCEP: MAPPING THE KEY ISSUES

R. V. Anuradha*

ABSTRACT

The RCEP negotiations were launched by leaders from the ten ASEAN members and ASEAN's FTA partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea and New Zealand) on November 20, 2012. The Guiding Principles for the negotiations emphasize that the trade in services negotiations under RCEP will be comprehensive, of high quality and substantially eliminate restrictions and/or discriminatory measures. They also make ASEAN+ FTAs as the starting point for negotiations, the aim being that RCEP would achieve liberalization beyond the ASEAN+ agreements. Liberalization of services within the ASEAN and in the ASEAN+ agreements has been fairly conservative. However, there is significant interest in market access for trade in services among the non-ASEAN parties to the RCEP. Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea and New Zealand — each have entered into several FTAs with fairly ambitious coverage of services liberalization. The diversity of interests and expectations is likely to make the RCEP negotiations an interesting and challenging one.

The RCEP negotiations present an opportunity to the participating countries to consolidate their inter se overlapping sets

* The author is a partner at Clarus Law Associates, New Delhi. Her focus areas include International Trade Law and Policy and Climate Change Law and Policy. A draft of this paper was presented at the AWRN Annual Conference, Taipei June 15-16, 2013. The author thanks the participants for their questions and feedback which have helped refine the discussions in this paper. The author is available at anuradha.rv@claruslaw.com.

of FTAs. It also presents a challenge because of the varying degrees of interests and levels of ambition of each of the participating countries, and the relative extent to which they seek to undertake commitments on liberalization in trade in services. This paper seeks to map the key issues in this regard.

KEYWORDS: *RCEP, ASEAN, ASEAN+, trade in services, cross-border services, movement of natural persons, mutual recognition*